



Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

Forest Plan Amendment #4

Indiana Bat Standards



DECISION

Based on my review of the Environmental Assessment (EA) for Amendment #4 Indiana Bat Standards, I have decided to implement Alternative 2 (Proposed Action). Alternative 2 amends the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the National Forests in Alabama to specifically:

Remove:

FW-106. To avoid injury to nonvolant young Indiana bats, prescribed burning of potential maternity roosting habitat between May 1 and July 1 is prohibited except where site-specific inventories indicate Indiana bats are not likely to be present.

Replace:

FW-101. When implementing two-aged forest regeneration methods (seedtree with reserves or shelterwood with reserves) in hardwood-dominated forest types, a minimum of 20 square feet of basal area will be retained. The overwood will not be removed. All snags and shagbark hickory over 6 inches DBH will be retained except those that are immediate hazards. All trees are retained within 20 feet of a minimum average of 5 snags per acre to provide potential Indiana bat roost trees with shade and windthrow protection. Where a minimum average of 5 snags per acre is not present, they will be created from the larger diameter classes within the stand. Snags selected for shade tree retention are those most suitable for use by Indiana bats, i.e., hardwood snags of the largest size classes with exfoliating bark.

And

FW-102. When implementing clearcut two-aged forest regeneration methods in hardwood-dominated forest types, a minimum average of 15 square feet of basal area per acre is retained throughout the rotation. Residual basal area should be clumped or left in travel corridors. All snags and shagbark hickory over 6 inches DBH are retained except those that are immediate hazards. If additional trees are needed to meet the basal area requirements, priority should be given to trees that exhibit characteristics favored by roosting Indiana bats. Snags do not count toward the basal area. In regeneration areas less than 10 acres in size, no residual basal area is

required for retention. However, all snags will be retained unless they are immediate hazards. Shagbark hickory greater than 6 inches DBH is retained in regeneration areas less than 10 acres in size.

With:

New FW-101. When implementing forest regeneration methods, recruit and retain snags and live loose-bark overstory species so that sufficient bat roosting habitat is provided. All snags will be retained unless they are immediate hazards.

And replace:

FW-104. Provide upland water sources approximately every 0.5 miles, to provide an important habitat element for wildlife, including the endangered Indiana bat. Water sources are comprised of both permanent ponds and ephemeral pools and are often located in openings or near road corridors that allow access by bats.

With:

New FW-104. Provide and/or conserve upland water sources as appropriate for rare bats, where they are considered to be limiting habitat factors.

DECISION AND RATIONALE

The Revised Forest Land and Resource Management Plan for the National Forests in Alabama (NFsAL) was signed in January 2004. At that time, the endangered Indiana bat was known to occur in cave hibernacula of the Bankhead National Forest and the Forest Plan contains nineteen standards concerning the management for this species. In the spring of 2012 and the spring of 2013 the Indiana Bat was documented on the Talladega Division of the Talladega National Forest. Forest Plan monitoring has indicated that four (FW-101, FW-102 and FW-104, and FW-106) of those standards need to be revised to more effectively manage habitat for this and other endangered species.

This amendment will allow flexibility in management and better focus management efforts where they are needed and to ensure Districts have the abilities to meet upland ecosystem restoration objectives, while still providing adequate Indiana bat and associated bat species habitats.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered on other alternative, the no action alternative.

Alternative 1 (No Action) - This alternative proposes no changes to current Forest Plan direction.

Under current Forest Plan direction, no prescribed burning of potential Indiana bat maternity habitat between May 1 and July 1 would be allowed, except where site-specific inventories indicate Indiana bats are not likely to be present.

Under current Forest Plan direction, existing standards regarding regeneration harvest in hardwoods would apply. All snags plus a minimum of 20 (seedtree) or 15 (shelterwood) basal area, plus all trees within a 20 ft. buffer surrounding a minimum of 5 snags, would be retained as roost habitat, regardless if the trees retained compromised restoration objections of the stand.

Also, under current Forest Plan direction, an effort to provide upland water sources (for Indiana bats and other wildlife) per every 0.5 mile would be required, even in locations where these resources are available or found not to be limiting (Forest plan p. 2-34).

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

On July 14, 2014 letters were mailed (or emailed for those who had provided email addresses) to those individuals and organizations on the Bankhead and Talladega Division mailing lists for requesting input and public involvement on this project. Two individuals responded during the scoping period (one requesting more information and the other encouraging the continued use of prescribed burning). This project has been listed on the Schedule of Proposed Actions since 2012. Public responses received are a part of the analysis file and were used in further development of the proposal or alternatives to the proposal.

On September 9, 2014 a legal notice was published in the *Montgomery Advertiser* (newspaper of record) and letters were mailed or emailed to individuals and organizations on the mailing list (Talladega Division and Bankhead) establishing the 30-day comment period. No responses have been received and pursuant to 36 CFR 219 none have standing to object.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

After considering the environmental effect described in the EA, I have determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of the impacts (40 CFR 1508.27), and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because this amendment is for a LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 5).

3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because this amendment is for a LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 5).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Because there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the amendment (see EA pages 5-9).
5. The effect analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA pages 5-9).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because this amendment is for a LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 1).
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant (see EA pages 5-9).
8. The action will not have significant adverse effects on resources listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. This action will not cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historic resources (EA pages 8-9).
9. The action will not adversely impact any endangered or threatened species or its habitat (see EA pages 6-8).
10. The action will not violate Federal, State or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment (See EA pages 5-9).

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

According to 36 CFR 219.17(b) (Federal Register, April 9, 2012), during the transition period that ends on May 9, 2015, the responsible official may elect to conduct the plan amendment process under the provisions of the prior regulation (which includes the transition period in the 2000 regulations that allows for the use of the “1982 planning regulations” [those regulations in effect before November 9, 2000]). I have elected to conduct this amendment following the 1982 planning regulations. After reviewing the Environmental Assessment that includes Amendment # 4 to the Forest Plan, I have determined that the decision to implement this amendment will not result in a significant change to the Forest Plan. This determination was made after consulting 16 U.S.C. 1604(f)(4), 36 CFR 219.10(f) (1982 regulations), Forest Service Manual 1926.51 – Changes to the Land Management Plan that are Not Significant and FSM 1926.52 – Changes to the Land Management Plan that are Significant. Based on these planning requirements, I have determined that:

- This amendment will not significantly alter the levels of goods and services projected by the Forest Plan; nor will it prevent the opportunity to achieve those outputs in later years.
- This amendment will not affect the entire land management plan, nor will it affect a large portion of the planning area during the planning period.

The decision to remove and replace these Forest Plan standards is consistent with the management direction, goals and objectives of the Forest Plan, which is consistent with the National Forest Management Act. The amendment does not propose any specific actions, but it will guide future activities consistent with forest planning requirements at 36 CFR 219.8-11.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION

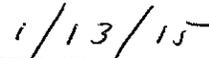
This decision is not subject to the objection procedures at 36 CFR 219.51(a) because no “substantive formal comments”, as defined by 36 CFR 219.62, were received during either the scoping period or the comment period. None have standing to object. This decision is effective immediately upon signing.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Ryan Shurette, Forest Biologist, National Forests in Alabama at 2946 Chestnut Street, Montgomery, AL or telephone 334-241-8143.



CARL PETRICK
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Date

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